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Reagan Treaties

President Reagan said Friday the United States has evidence the Soviet Union violated an arms control agreement, but cannot prove it because ambiguous wording in past treaties "amounts to loopholes."

Any treaty his administration negotiates, Reagan said at a brief White House news conference, will allow the United States to collect "hard and fast ... courtroom evidence" of any violation.

Reagan indicated he has given up a plan to publicly accuse the Soviets at this time of violating the 1979 Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty with a test Feb. 8 of an intercontinental ballistic missile.

Speaking March 31 in Los Angeles, Reagan said: "There have been increasingly serious grounds for questioning their compliance with the arms control agreements that have already been signed and that we have both pledged to uphold. I may have more to say on this in the future."

Reagan told the news conference Friday an interagency task force still is studying the possible violation. In such cases, he said, the task force reports to the National Security Council and may ask the Soviets for more information before presenting its finding to him.

"The Soviet Union says they were testing an improved version of a missile that is proper under the treaty," he said. "We said it might be a new missile."

Administration officials have said there is a virtual consensus at the Pentagon, CIA, State Department and White House that the missile the Soviets tested Feb. 8 was a new one rather than a modified version of the single-warhead SS-13 as the Soviets claim.

But, Reagan said, "It is difficult to establish hard and fast evidence there is a violation. ... You can't get that kind of courtroom evidence you need, you can't make the charge of a violation."

A violation would not make it more difficult to negotiate a new arms control treaty, he said, "but it imposes a responsibility on us to be more careful on a new treaty than we have been in the past."

"There have been evidences in the past when we have had indications that might possibly mean a violation. ... Unfortunately, those previous treaties are so ambiguous that it amounts to loopholes," Reagan said.

"It is so ambiguous that it is difficult to establish and have hard and fast evidence that a treaty has been violated," he said.

"We've learned enough since we've been here to know that any treaties we sign with the Soviets we're going to make sure they are not ambiguous, the clauses that are in there are hard and fast."